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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001396

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM NI ELECTIONS

SUBJECT: ABIA STATE SUPPORTERS SWITCH PARTIES TO BACK KALU
PRESIDENTIAL BID

REF: A. LAGOS 607 B. 05 LAGOS 1801

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Abia State Governor Orji Kalu's aides claim President Obasanjo has punished the State, by withholding federal resources and assistance, for Kalu's vociferous opposition to President Obasanjo. In support of Kalu's presidential bid, Kalu's advisors say his youth would allow him to relate to armed militants in a manner that will ameliorate the Niger Delta crisis. Many Kalu supporters have switched to the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) party, but the Governor remains in the People's Democratic Party (PDP) for now. End summary.

Abia State Conditions No Better Than Elsewhere

¶2. (U) In early November Poloff and Polspec visited Umuahia, capital of Abia State. Umuahia is no better than other cities in the Southeast. Roads are poor. Power shortages are commonplace. During the visit, Poloff noticed one neighborhood with immaculate grounds and well-serviced roads.

It happened to be the neighborhood where the Abia State Speaker resides.

Infrastructure Reflects Obasanjo's Dislike of Kalu

¶3. (C) Victor Onochie, Senior Special Assistant for Special Duties to the Governor, ascribed the State's poor infrastructure to Kalu's inveterate feud with Obasanjo. Kalu opposed the third term amendment, and has opposed Obasanjo's attempt to control Abia State, Onochie contended. According to Onochie, the President responded to Kalu's strident opposition by canceling funding for numerous projects and zeroing funds for the maintenance of federal roads in Abia. As a result, the people of Abia have suffered, Onochie added.

¶4. (C) Another source of friction has been Kalu's presidential ambitions, Onochie opined. According to Onochie, Kalu started eyeing the presidency the moment he became Governor, and has spent his two terms building toward this goal.

Kalu Presidency Would Address Niger Delta Crisis...

¶5. (SBU) When Poloff asked what would be the priorities of a Kalu presidency, Onochie remarked that Kalu would be fair to all sections and groups in Nigeria. Kalu, at 46 one of the

youngest of the presidential contenders, would represent a new generation, Onochie asserted. Kalu's relative youth would enable him to better deal with the Niger Delta militants, as he would go to them himself and talk to their leaders. As Onochie described it, "The boys in the creeks are the boys of our generation, and they have seen too many broken promises from the government".

¶6. (U) Sunday Nwakama, a journalist with Abia State, described Kalu as the one candidate who truly champions the Igbo cause. However, backtracking a few steps from this ethnic chauvinism, Nwakama noted that Kalu as governor has employed people from different ethnicities, and is the candidate with the best understanding of Nigeria's ethnic mosaic.

...And Uphold Rule of Law

¶7. (SBU) According to Onochie, Kalu's successful business background makes him likely to honor contracts, both political and commercial. Obasanjo has a poor understanding of economics and has not had the patience to learn. The top priority of a Kalu presidency would be building infrastructure and provide consistent electric power, Onochie stressed.

¶8. (C) Onochie told Poloff that Kalu initiated contact with opposition candidates Ibrahim Babangida, Vice-President Atiku and Muhammadu Buhari to form an alliance. Kalu is reaching out to potential allies to form an alliance in opposition to Obasanjo, Onochie stated.

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Kalu Supporters Switch to the PPA

¶9. (U) On the recommendation of Onochie, Poloff visited the Abia Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) secretariat. The PPA secretariat occupies the building that formerly housed the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which has now moved 200 meters down the same street. Fresh blue and white paint representing the PPA has replaced the PDP colors of red, white, and green. At the PPA office, posters touting Kalu for President were ubiquitous.

¶10. (C) Dr. Emeka Onuoha, Administrative Secretary for the Abia PPA, explained that important, pro-Kalu members of the Abia PDP have switched to the PPA. According to Onuoha, PPA members are disenchanted with the pro-Obasanjo National Secretariat trying to control the State chapter. The PDP, in

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Onuoha's opinion, is no longer relevant to people's lives. PDP has monetized all party offices and nominations. Every position has a pricetag, he lamented. In contrast, the PPA planned to have open nominations and follow a democratic process. The PPA will run candidates for all the major positions in Abia, Onuoha stated. (Comment: Onuoha's statement about an open process would be perjurious if uttered in court. Kalu has governed Abia as a closed shop. We doubt the PPA will function any differently. End comment)

¶11. (C) When Poloff asked Onuoha about the Kalu posters, he responded that "Of course, he is not a member (of the PPA), but he is the Governor." PPA has an existing structure, Onuoha claimed, as "nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have rallied to us".

An EFCC Investigation Looms, but No Impeachment Yet

¶12. (C) Kalu is one of the governors squarely in the crosshairs of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Speaking before the Senate, EFCC Chief Ribadu charged Kalu with misappropriating over 65 billion Naira (500 million USD) of public funds. Responding to the charges, Onochie repeated an earlier Kalu charge that the EFCC has been a very active tool of President Obasanjo to shackle the Governor and other opponents. Onochie claimed that after the EFCC team's visit to Abia months ago, the investigation has fizzled.

APGA Rejects Kalu

¶13. (SBU) Longman Nwachukwu, factional Abia State chairman of the All-Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) to which Kalu earlier reached out for support (Ref B), described Kalu as incompetent and corrupt. Citing as examples a power plant scheduled for Abia that went to Ogun and a dry port that went to Kano instead of Abia, Nwachukwu commented that Abia has lost important infrastructure projects and experienced severe shortages in water and electricity during Kalu's tenure. Reciting the EFCC charges against Kalu, Nwachukwu also claimed Kalu set up an eight billion Naira account (60 million USD) in his daughter's name. Nwachukwu also charged that the Broadcasting Corporation of Abia (BCA) refused to show paid announcements from APGA, while devoting coverage glorifying Kalu and his mother.

¶14. (C) Comment: Kalu has made no secret of his ambition for the presidency, and has openly clashed with Obasanjo on the third term and other governance issues. (ref A) Kalu is a longshot as a presidential candidate, and has suffered a diminution in his popularity as a result of the poor state of Abia's transportation grid and waste management. Nevertheless, he still has some popularity, particularly among young Igbo males. Depending on how the die is cast, he could emerge as a Vice-Presidential candidate on a serious ticket. End comment.
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